

this administration; it is a measure of their failure.

Back in April, my colleague the Democratic leader heaped praise on what he called President Biden's "careful and thought-out plan with a real timetable and a firm end date." Does he stand by this lavish praise for a careful and thought-out plan? Crickets. Was it wise to conduct our retreat during the height of the fighting season? Was it sound strategy to preemptively abandon the strategic Bagram Air Base in the middle of the night without telling our partners? Was it careful and prudent to tie our departure to the 20th anniversary of September 11?

Our botched retreat from a so-called endless war cost more American lives than nearly the prior 2 years combined. And make no mistake, the war against terror hasn't ended—far, far from it. In a rare moment of candor, the Biden administration's own experts have admitted explicitly that we will face new terrorist threats from inside Afghanistan sooner rather than later. We will have to face a more entrenched and emboldened enemy with fewer resources, fewer friends, and more constraints.

So virtually every reason and advantage that President Biden said this policy would bring about has already proven absolutely false.

The administration said leaving Afghanistan would let us focus more resources on China, but its catastrophic retreat has tied up even more resources, including strategic naval assets from the Indo-Pacific. And while the administration's officials are consumed—consumed—with this catastrophe, China is cultivating deeper ties with the Taliban.

The administration told us our military and intelligence community could keep terrorists at bay with over-the-horizon capabilities, but longer distances, fewer assets, and less intelligence are already taking their toll, and innocent civilians appear to be paying the price.

Even still, the White House continues to peddle misleading comparisons with operations in other theaters, ignoring the unique challenges of keeping close eyes on a landlocked country with a hostile government thousands of miles from U.S. bases.

Administration officials like to say there is no imminent threat posed by al-Qaida emanating from Afghanistan. But their abandonment of Afghanistan has already allowed that threat to grow, and we will have fewer resources with which to confront the gathering threat. According to press reporting, just this very morning, the Deputy Director of the CIA has acknowledged they are seeing al-Qaida terrorists flowing back—back—into Afghanistan, and our intelligence capabilities are already diminished.

But there is a larger pattern of broken promises. The President said that everyone who wanted to get out would be able to do so, that we would leave no

one behind. Instead, we left Americans and vulnerable Afghans behind.

Secretary Blinken said the Taliban committed to allow Americans and vulnerable Afghans safe passage to the airport. Instead, we know Americans and Afghans were prevented from getting to the airport. Many still cannot leave.

The administration said that we would have tremendous leverage over the Taliban, that they would need international recognition and funding. Yet the Taliban doesn't seem to be terribly concerned with global PR.

The administration said they would hold the Taliban accountable. They haven't.

The administration seems to believe the Taliban would establish an inclusive and representational government. Look, we are talking about a government of medieval theocrats—medieval theocrats—the same killers, kidnapers, and hostage-takers who aided and abetted the terrorist architects of 9/11.

Well, their government is, however, inclusive in one way. It is inclusive in one way. Listen to this. It includes four—four—of the Guantanamo Bay terrorists released by President Obama in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl; four people who were at GTMO, exchanged for Bowe Bergdahl. And that is only part of the government. It also includes a senior Haqqani terrorist with a \$5 million bounty on his head and American blood on his hands—another top official in the government. This is not a government that cares about staying in the good graces of the so-called international community.

Enough fluff. Enough spin. It is time for hard truths and accountability. The Biden administration's conduct over the past several months demands thorough instigation by the Senate. That will begin with Secretary Blinken's hearing at the Foreign Relations Committee today. I hope the Secretary and the administration he represents are prepared to answer some tough questions about past decisions, as well as future plans. The American people and the vulnerable partners we have left behind deserve nothing less.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of James Richard Kvaal, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary of Education.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip is recognized.

#### BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in just a moment, I want to talk a little bit about the situation in Afghanistan. But before I do that, I just wanted to speak to something that the majority leader said earlier regarding some of the upcoming business that we have to deal with this fall.

We have a whole series of deadlines in front of us. The fiscal year ends on September 30, meaning that we have to at some point fund the government, which presumably would be in the form of a continuing resolution. We are told that the House of Representatives, when they move that and send it over here, will include a debt-limit increase.

The debt limit does run out, and we will hit that at some point. There are varying estimates of when exactly that would be—some say as early as mid-October; some say perhaps mid-November—but inevitably that will be upon us. There has been a discussion here about how that ought to be lifted and who ought to deliver the votes to get that done.

I just want to make the point that the majority leader, as he was down here making his remarks earlier, indicated that this was all debt that was accumulated during the previous administration. Certainly there was some debt because, obviously, during the coronavirus pandemic, all of us responded in a very bipartisan way. Most of the debt was at that point in time. It was the votes that we made in March of 2020 and subsequently to that.

Of course, there was another \$2 trillion earlier this year in February, which no Republican voted for—that was all Democratic votes—most of which had nothing to do with the virus; most of which had to do with other elements of their agenda, including expanding the government.

But, nevertheless, when the debt limit hit its expiration at the end of July, it reset, and it covered everything up until that point. What we are talking about now is raising the debt limit to accommodate trillions and trillions of new spending proposed by the Democrats here in Washington and by the President and his administration.

It strikes me, at least, that that being the case, if the Democrats on their own, without a single Republican vote—and there won't be any Republican votes for the \$3½ trillion bill they are talking about, which the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says really isn't \$3½ trillion; it is \$5½ trillion—\$5½ trillion of new spending, massive expansion of the government, financed some with tax increases but inevitably some with adding to the debt—that it would make sense, since the Democrats are going to do that through reconciliation, which is a purely partisan exercise, with only their votes, that it could accommodate

an increase in the debt limit to pay for all of that spending.

I think that is a fair—very fair way to look at this. It strikes me, at least, that since the Democrats have embarked upon this one-party-rule approach, that if they are going to spend another \$3½ to \$5½ trillion, that they ought to raise the debt limit to accommodate all that additional spending. I think that is a reasonable way to approach this, and I, frankly, think it is consistent if you look at what has happened in the past.

The last time we raised the debt limit was in the summer of 2019. That was a bipartisan deal, and it was a bipartisan deal that actually put caps on spending. We were limiting spending as we were raising the debt limit. Republicans and Democrats joined together at the time to do that.

The spending that I referenced in March of 2020, the \$4½ trillion or thereabouts that was spent on the response to the pandemic, was also bipartisan. In fact, it was so bipartisan, it passed in the Senate 96 to 0. Does anybody here ever remember anything around here passing 96 to 0, particularly of that consequence? Clearly—clearly—there was strong bipartisan support for doing something that needed to be done in response to the worst pandemic we have seen in this country in a century.

Those were things that were done in a bipartisan fashion. Now, this is an entirely different scenario. And I don't think anybody can dispute the fact that the Democrats, as they embark upon this \$3½ trillion reckless tax-and-spending spree, and, again, other estimates—the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says it is not \$3½ trillion; it is actually \$5½ trillion when you look at the spend out in the various budget windows and timelines.

But let's just say for the sake of argument that it is \$3½ trillion to \$5½ trillion. It is still a massive amount of spending, none of which is related to the coronavirus, all of which is part of a dramatic expansion of government, which I have referred to before here on the floor as the “free everything” bill—literally cradle to grave, the government, the Federal Government, will take care of you—in addition to a lot of other leftwing agenda priorities like green energy provisions and all sorts of things in this that are Democratic priorities with no buy-in from Republicans, no attempt to reach out to Republicans or to do anything in a bipartisan way.

This is a strictly, purely partisan exercise in which the Democrats are trying to include things that have absolutely no relationship to spending, debt, or revenues, which is what the reconciliation process is designed for.

They are talking about doing immigration—immigration—major, major policy that needs to be done on a bipartisan basis that affects this country in a profound way, as we can see from the crisis at the border. Already in the

month of July of this year, there was a 420-percent increase over the previous year in the number of illegal crossings. Two hundred and twelve thousand people came across the border illegally just in the month of July. It is a major, consequential crisis. The Democrats are going to try to do something to legalize people who are here illegally without addressing the other elements of the immigration debate on a strictly partisan basis as a part of the reconciliation bill. This is a purely, purely partisan exercise done without any input from Republicans.

I don't think there is a single Republican who ought to be pushed into or feel like they in any way need to support the massive expansion of government we are talking about here, the trillions and trillions and trillions of dollars in new spending.

That is what the debt limit is about. It is about raising the amount of debt, the amount that this country can borrow, to pay for a massive expansion—massive expansion, reckless expansion—of our government that moves us more in the direction of a Western European social democracy rather than the American country that I think we all know and love.

We have a heritage in this country. It is built around freedom. It is built around individual responsibility. It is built on the need to protect our country and maintain a strong national defense. I think that is one thing I hope that, as we look at spending, we can agree upon.

But this massive expansion of what they call social or human infrastructure is nothing more and nothing less than the biggest expansion of government that we have seen literally in decades, and it will be financed—some—with tax increases, which I could spend a lot of time talking about, which will harm the economy, but also with additional debt.

And that debt, the debt that is acquired for the huge runup in spending that will be supported purely by Democrats through reconciliation, a procedure that is a partisan procedure, that ought to be paid for—that ought to be done by Democrat votes. And it can be done. There is a way in which the reconciliation procedure can be used to raise the debt limit to pay for all of the new spending that the Democrats have in this bill.

So when they get down here and talk about how important it is to be bipartisan, well, it would be one thing if there was actually any kind of a bipartisan negotiation going on, but there isn't. And the last time the debt limit was raised, there was, in 2019, and at that time it was about caps. It was about reducing spending. There was a bipartisan agreement to reduce spending as the debt limit was being increased.

The other thing I would mention in response to what the majority leader said earlier is that the debt that was accumulated in the previous adminis-

tration, much of which was done on a bipartisan basis in response to the biggest pandemic that this country has seen in a hundred years, in March of 2020—\$4.5 trillion of that debt was put on the bill because of a bipartisan agreement that was reached, as I said earlier, 96 to 0. Ninety-six to 0 was the vote here in the U.S. Senate.

So Democrats want to go down this path. If they want to spend, spend, spend like there is no tomorrow and tax, tax, tax like there is no tomorrow and borrow, borrow, borrow like there is no tomorrow, then they ought to pay, pay, pay with their votes when it comes to raising the debt limit and, unfortunately, handing the bill for that to our kids and grandkids.

#### AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, 20 years ago, on a clear September morning, the unthinkable happened: an attack on our Nation here at home on our own soil. Almost 3,000 Americans died that day, and our Nation reeled. But in the midst of grief and fear, there was also hope.

We saw evil on September 11, but in the days and weeks that followed, we saw good as well: the first responders who raced to the scene and spent the weeks after combing through the rubble, the heroic Americans who fought back against the terrorists on United Flight No. 93, the hours-long lines for blood donations as Americans scrambled to do anything they could to help.

And out of the ashes of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the field near Shanksville, PA, came a new birth of patriotism and resolve. America might be bloodied, but she would not break. Evil and terror would not win.

The 9/11 generation of warriors and intelligence personnel took the fight to the terrorists in the Middle East and around the world. Our men and women in uniform dismantled terrorist safe havens, disrupted terrorist groups, thwarted attacks, and hunted down and delivered justice to Osama bin Laden.

In Afghanistan, the downfall of the Taliban at the hands of our soldiers and our NATO allies allowed a generation of Afghans to grow up in freedom.

I was honored to get to spend part of September 11 with members of the South Dakota Air National Guard, many of whom served overseas in the fight against terrorism.

As we marked the 20th anniversary of September 11 on Saturday, our soldiers and our veterans should have been able to reflect on their successes in the fight against terrorism over the past two decades, but I know that today many of them are struggling with the recent events in Afghanistan.

The U.S. disastrous, hasty withdrawal is a stain on our Nation's history and a betrayal of the men and women who fought there. But I hope they know that their sacrifices and the sacrifices of their comrades were not in vain. As I said, their actions enabled a generation of Afghans to grow up free from the oppressive hand of the